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(58) Field of Search

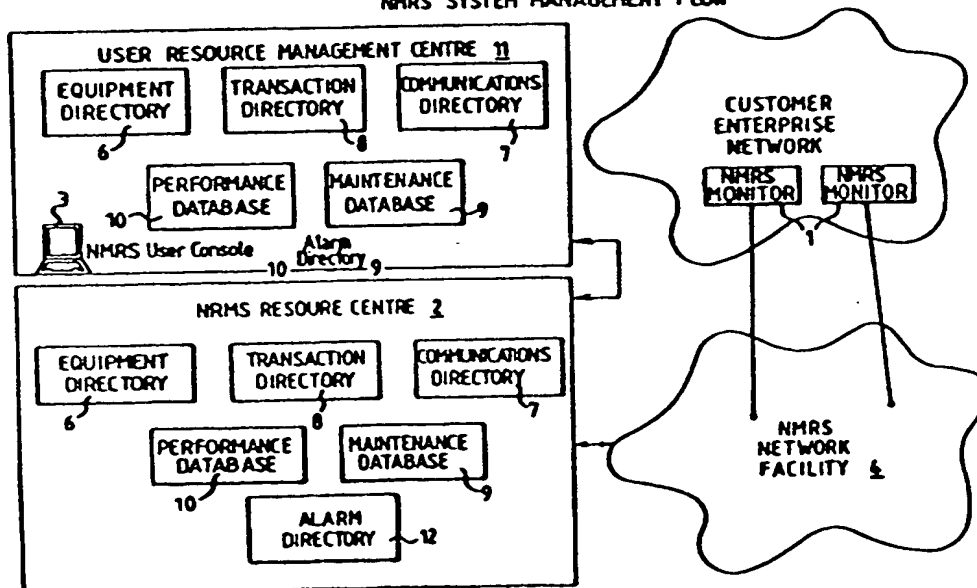
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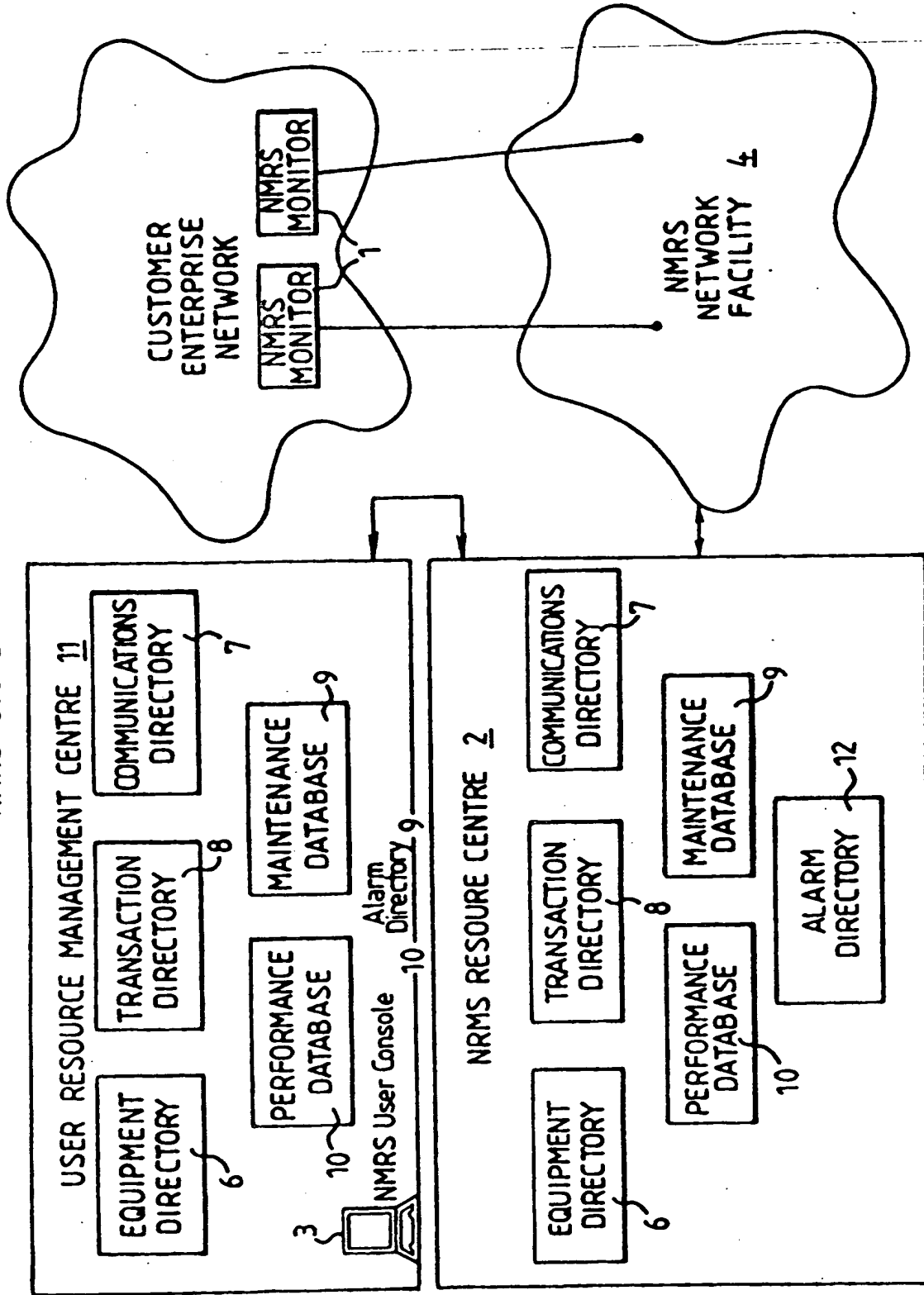
(54) Monitoring computer network transactions

(57) A network manager collects information and converts the information to reports that emphasize the network management and financial aspects of a computer network. The system provides a network monitor/data collection function 1, a network environment 4 to communicate among the activities, an end-user interface system 11 to support network information services, and a resource center 2 which is a repository of network data collected, information processing, and network coordination and monitor data collection personality. The network transaction data is collected by network monitors 1 and is transmitted in a processed form to the central resource center 2, which performs a series of data manipulation functions and stores in a database the information necessary to produce both standard and user-defined reports.

NRMS SYSTEM MANAGEMENT FLOW



# NMRS SYSTEM MANAGEMENT FLOW



## ENTERPRISE NETWORK MANAGEMENT METHOD AND APPARATUS

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a network monitoring facility. In particular, the present invention relates to a system for summarizing network usage to give general business decision support. The system of the present invention provides reports of network transactional information from financial and operational viewpoints.

Background of the Invention

The growth of the networking solution to enterprise-wide computer applications has spawned a number of user problems. Many of these problems are based on the operational aspect of the computer hardware and software. The problems that occur have resulted a number of systems to monitor the network facilities to allow an efficient fault tracking capability. These monitoring systems generally encompass hardware and software that are located at the different client locations and that collect and report on the network operation. The method of user interface and the scope of this support varies by system but the general purpose is consistently the quick detection of network faults or problems and the efficient resolution of these faults or problems or a graphical representation of the network topology. This class of product is designed for use by the system administration professional having numerous years of network expertise.

For example, U.S. Patent Number 5,315,580 to Phaal for a "Network Monitoring Device and System" discloses a system composed of hardware and software for monitoring and sampling network packets and for delivering this information to a central

1 measurement station. U.S. Patent Number 5,317,564 to Nugent for a "Merging  
2 Network for Collection of Data from Multi-Computers" discloses a system of hardware  
3 and software for measuring parameters of operation and transmitting them as packets  
4 to a collector node for processing. U.S. Patent Number 5,295,244 to DeV, et al. for a  
5 "Network Management System Using Interconnected Hierarchies to Represent  
6 Different Network Dimensions in Multiple Display Views" discloses a network manager  
7 which represents the interactions of network entities to a user. It provides a way for the  
8 user to access information about the status of the network. U.S. Patent Numbers  
9 5,226,120 to Brown, et al. , 5,101,402 to Chiu, et al. , 5,067,107 to Wade , and  
10 4,817,080 to Soha all disclose similar combinations of hardware and software for  
11 monitoring the network data by examining packets and presenting a summary of the  
12 traffic to support the network administrator.

13 Early computer networks were simple mainframes communicating to remote job  
14 entry (RJE) stations having functions limited to the processing of transactions in  
15 support of enterprise applications. These computer networks have evolved into  
16 massive complex topologies. The operation of these networks support all phases and  
17 operations of the business enterprise. This support includes the former transaction  
18 processing applications as well as all phases of the management hierarchy. There are  
19 very few business activities that are not supported by these complex computer systems.  
20 An implication of this growth in size, complexity, and functionality is that almost all costs  
21 of the various business activities are related to the efficient and cost-effective operation  
22 of the computer network. The evolution of the purpose and sophistication of the

1 monitor programs has not met this increased level of operational need.

2       The evolution of computer application has followed a steady path from the old  
3 transaction type of processing (payroll, billing, etc.) to almost all levels of the business  
4 hierarchy. Many products exist that support the executive in analyzing the information  
5 gathered from business applications in order to make well informed specific operational  
6 management decisions. The user interfaces of these products have also been  
7 enhanced to allow executives the ability to view this information and even to create new  
8 ad-hoc views to support their particular business activities. These products allow the  
9 summarizing of transactional data and the creating of simple but effective  
10 representations that will allow the decision maker to make an informed decision as well  
11 as to create presentations that will persuade other interested management personnel to  
12 accept these decisions. This use of the lower level transactional data to create these  
13 up to the minute operational views has not yet been translated into network monitoring  
14 activities.

15       The monitoring programs that are currently available can be compared to the  
16 early programs that allowed some creation of transactional summary information from  
17 the early computer applications. The present day monitors require a computer  
18 professional to understand the implications of the network transactions and the results  
19 are given purely in terms of finding and the detecting any faults and operational  
20 difficulties of the network. Other products only focus on giving a graphical  
21 representation of the network. There is a strong and present need to upgrade the level  
22 of these programs to facilitate the same sort of decision support mechanisms that are

1     available to the business management executives.

2             The monitor programs currently available allow the user to pick a transaction  
3     type and to pull network statistics from simple databases that keep a record of all  
4     packets (lowest level of network transaction). These statistics can be formed into  
5     reports that are understood by an experienced network professional in order to  
6     facilitate the detection of the location and type of network fault conditions. Other types  
7     of systems could be used to collect and present, in a meaningful and useful way, the  
8     kind of information required by business management executives.

9             For example, there has long been a need to be able to control the network  
10    operation from an executive management perspective. The information that is being  
11    gathered could be combined with business information relating to costs of operation.  
12    The user interface should be able to be used by a non-computer professional and the  
13    information that is presented would pertain to the business objectives and control of the  
14    computer network as a critical business function. The ability to create timely ad-hoc  
15    reports of the information cross referenced by location, time of day, and type of  
16    equipment and/or other factors of interest to the user would play an important role in  
17    helping management determine the most efficient usage of the most costly network  
18    components. These reports should also identify what usage requirements are needed  
19    in each location including the elusive random burst usage information. A system is  
20    necessary to make this evolutionary leap to control these increasingly complex network  
21    topologies with a simple easy to understand implementation and user interface in order  
22    to provide meaningful information and useful network activity measurement capabilities.

**Summary of the Invention**

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a computer hardware and software system to facilitate the user's financial and organizational control of the network topology.

It is an additional objective of the present invention to provide an overview of the entire network with a minimum of delay. (Nominally less than 10 minutes delay for a view of the user's entire network.)

It is a further objective of the present invention to provide data pertaining to network cost factors, for example, network maintenance performance such as hardware mean-time to failure and mean-time to repair.

It is also an objective of the present invention to provide comparisons of network operations in different time zones by client/server, or by user defined transaction activity and/or essentially any factor that can be user defined.

It is a further objective of the present invention to provide dedicated virtual network equipment and network facility reports.

It is an additional objective of the present invention to provide users the ability to easily update network information such as client/server additions and deletions before the effective date of the change.

It is another objective of the present invention to provide information on the condition of the network, LAN, or client/server availability.

It is also an objective of the present invention to provide information on network operations and statistics on network activity, site location, equipment type, and

1 communication link typ .

2 It is yet a further objectiv of the present invention to provide a comparison of  
3 vendor performance such as the impact of time of day, holidays, major disasters, etc.,  
4 on vendor performance.

5 These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will be  
6 apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon inspection of the detailed description,  
7 drawings, and appended claims.

8 The system of the present invention is a means for supporting a network  
9 manager by collecting data pertaining to the financial and operational characteristics of  
10 networks. The network manager collects information and converts the information to  
11 reports that emphasize the network management and financial aspects of a computer  
12 network. These reports may be selected, designed and/or formatted by the network  
13 executive in a manner that best meets the manager's unique needs.

14 The present invention accomplishes this function through the use of four distinct  
15 activities performed by the system. These activities provide a network monitor/data  
16 collection function, a proprietary network environment to communicate among these  
17 activities, an end-user interface system to support network information services, and a  
18 resource center activity is a repository of network data collected, information  
19 processing, and network coordination and monitor data collection personality.

20 The network transaction data is collected from each configured LAN by the  
21 attached network monitors. This data is transmitted in a processed form to a central  
22 resource center. The central resource center performs a series of data manipulation



1 functions and stores in a database the information necessary to produce both standard  
2 and user-defined reports. The end-user is allowed to directly input data that gives  
3 vendor specific information, and also to input a description of the network hardware,  
4 software, and interfaces. The end-user can also define sub-activities (virtual networks)  
5 to facilitate the tracking of information in relation to a specific business unit. The end-  
6 user may specify a number of conditions (alarms) that will produce specific  
7 management attention if met. These include critical and sensitive situations as well as  
8 specific location outages.

#### 9 Brief Description of the Drawings

10 FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of the system of the present invention.

#### 11 Detailed Description of the Present Invention

#### 12 Definitions

13 Network Management Resource Services or "NMSR") is a product family that  
14 allows enterprise network users to manage, monitor, measure, and improve the  
15 cost/performance of a business activity.

16 A Transaction is one or more functions, which, when executed, accomplish a  
17 specific enterprise purpose (business or network).

18 NMRS Data is data generated from the NMRS Monitor for database use.

19 NMRS Monitor is the source of NMRS data. This is normally a device that is  
20 connected to each LAN in a network.

21 User Console is an input/output device that permits the user to communicate  
22 with the NMRS User Service Management Resource Desk.

1           NMRS User Resource Desk is an interface that responds to a user request and  
2 accepts user-provided instructions and data from the user console.

3           Sub-Activity (Business) is a network activity that is an integral subset of a  
4 Business Activity. For example, inventory "look up" might be a sub-activity of a Sales  
5 Activity.

#### 6   Disclosure

7           The present invention, known as Network Management Resource Services  
8 (NMRS), is able to collect and monitor network traffic information and allow high level  
9 financial and operational management information. This information is used to support  
10 strategic network management decisions in such areas as asset management and  
11 control, vendor hardware repair/maintenance cost comparisons, and other user  
12 configurable reporting areas. The different system functions are integrated to allow an  
13 enterprise-wide collection of network data and to transform this data into information  
14 that is available to a management professional.

15          The user (typically a network executive or staff) can retrieve figures on the  
16 MTBF for vendor specific, site specific, usage rate, activity type, etc. The system focus  
17 is on the reporting of network performance and availability, and on numerous cost  
18 factors as opposed to fault diagnosis. Referring to FIG. 1, the NMRS system is  
19 described. The NMRS system includes four major functional modules. These are the  
20 NMRS Resource Center 2, the User Resource Management Center 11, the NMRS  
21 Network Facility 4, and the NMRS Monitor 1.

22          The NMRS Resource Center 2 serves as a database depository to support user

1 network data collection and user report generation. This service is supported by and is  
2 physically located on a supplier's premises. The system is supported by the use of a  
3 database manager, the NMRS Network Facility 4, computer system hardware base,  
4 NMRS application programs, and the transmitted data summaries collected by the  
5 NMRS Monitor 1.

6 The User Resource Management Center 11 has a functional capability similar to  
7 that of the NMRS Resource Center 2. It will be physically located on the user's  
8 premises whereas the NMRS Resource Center 2 is located on the suppliers premises.  
9 The system is set up and supported by components similar to those of the NMRS  
10 Resource Center 2. One exception is that the data collection function is only performed  
11 by the NMRS Resource Center 2. An NMRS User Console 3 is attached to this system  
12 in order to provide the user with an application interface to the created information.  
13 This information is downloaded from the NMRS Resource Center 2 via the NMRS  
14 Network Facility 4.

15 The NMRS Network Facility 4 transports data collected from the user network by  
16 the NMRS Monitor 1 to the NMRS Resource Center 2. This data can be summarized by  
17 the NMRS Monitor 1 to limit the amount of data that is sent. The NMRS Network Facility  
18 4 is also used to transport the data required to provide NMRS services to its users.

19 The NMRS Monitor 1 is connected to each LAN in the user's network. The  
20 NMRS Monitor 1 collects data for each user-defined transaction. The summarized  
21 results are passed to the NMRS Resource Center 2 via the provided NMRS Network

1     Facility 4.

2             The NMRS Resource Center 2 defines the logical user network by the use of  
3     three directories. These directories support the storage and retrieval of user  
4     information to identify the hardware, links, and customer-specific information that  
5     details the type of transactions to be managed as well as data on vendors and  
6     business activities. These directories are called the Equipment Directory 6, the  
7     Communications Directory 7, and the Transaction (sub-activity) Directory 8.

8             The Equipment Directory 6 is a group of tables that define the network and  
9     record data for use in customer reports. The following is an outline of some key items  
10    that are included in the equipment directory:

- 11    -     LAN table - a record for each user LAN;
- 12    -     LAN type table - a record for each type of user LAN;.
- 13    -     Site table - a record for each user site where one or more LAN's are located;.
- 14    -     Status table - a record for each customer-assigned state condition;.
- 15    -     Device table - a record for each device (or node) on any LAN;
- 16    -     Kind table - a record for each kind (file server, etc.) of device on any LAN;
- 17    -     Device type table - a record for each type of device (or node) on any LAN  
18    (example: Compaq 486-16, 16M, 500MB);
- 19    -     OS table - a record for each type of operating system used in a device on any  
20    LAN (example: DOS 6.2).

21             The Communication Directory 7 defines which interconnect network LANs. There  
22    may be as few as one communications link in this directory.

1 - Vendor table - a record for each vendor(or supplier) of communications channels  
2 connected to devices on any LAN. Typically the communication channel is conned to  
3 a LAN by a router d vice.

4 The Transaction Directory 8 contains a group of tables that define the virtual  
5 networks constituting the total enterprise network. This organization will always contain  
6 at least the following two tables:

7 - Sub-activity table - a record for each customer-defined sub-activity defined for  
8 any business activity; and

9 - Business activity table - a record for each customer-defined business activity.

10 The NMRS Resource Center 2 supports two other basic functions. These are a  
11 Performance Database 10 and an Alarm Directory 12. The Performance Database 10  
12 contains a record for each combination of origination unit, termination unit, and  
13 business activity which provides the number of frames and average sizes of frames for  
14 each period of time (nominally six minutes). The Alarm Directory 12 is a group of tables  
15 that specify customer-assigned names for alarm conditions, customer selections for  
16 conditions to be alarmed and customer selection of alarm display and alerting  
17 treatment.

18 The User Resource Management Center 11 contains a similar technical  
19 organization. The information is received from the NMRS Resource Center 2 based on  
20 a user request that is entered via the User Console 3 and downloaded by the NMRS  
21 Network Facility 4. There is no network monitor data collection function within this  
22 system. This keeps the process of collecting and packaging of network transactions

1 from affecting other non-NMRS applications.

2       The NMRS Network Facility 4 provides the coordination between the various  
3 NMRS activities. This mechanism will provide the means by which the collected data  
4 from the NMRS Monitor 1 is transported to the NMRS Resource Center 2. The NMRS  
5 Network Facility 4 also delivers the information to the User Resource Management  
6 Center 11 that is necessary to support the various end-user information analysis and  
7 maintenance applications.

8       The NMRS Monitor 1 is connected to each LAN in the user's network. The  
9 NMRS Monitor application collects data for each user transaction. Each data record  
10 has at least five pieces of information. These are the origination unit, the destination  
11 unit, the transaction type, the frame count, and the frame size. At a programmable  
12 interval, the user activity records are bundled by the monitor together with a header  
13 including the monitor number, the time interval, and the record count. The processed  
14 activity records with a header record are transmitted to the NMRS Resource Center 2  
15 via the NMRS Network Facility 4.

16       Once the NMRS is installed, the user-specific data about the configuration of the  
17 network is entered. This will include all of the information used to support the end-user  
18 applications as well as customer selected information to support specific personalized  
19 application interfaces. This information includes data about the type of hardware, the  
20 location of hardware, LANs, virtual (logical) networks, operating systems, vendors, and  
21 definitions for business activities and sub-activities. Also, the user describes the names  
22 and conditions and user-interface options of the alarms (management alert) database.

1           Once the NMRS is operational th NMRS Monitor 1 will begin to transmit  
2 transaction data to the NMRS Resource Center 2. First, th information is grouped and  
3 packaged with information identifying th particular monitor. The information is sent to  
4 the NMRS Resource Center 2 via the NMRS Network Facility 4. The information is then  
5 analyzed and records are created that store transaction averages by activity and sub-  
6 activity.

7           The User Resource Management System 11 is now able to provide management  
8 information to the end-user via the NMRS User Console 3. The user will select to  
9 begin. The NMRS Resource Center 2 will receive the request via the NMRS Network  
10 Facility 4. The NMRS application programs will begin to format the information that  
11 support the end-user interface as well as collect the most up to date information. After a  
12 period of less than 10 minutes, the end-user session is ready to begin.

13           The end-user can select from a wide variety of reports that use the existing  
14 database. A partial list includes :

- 15           - hardware repair /maintenance by vendor report;
- 16           - MTBF rates by vendor;
- 17           - MTBF rates by site location;
- 18           - MTBF by usage rate;
- 19           - MTBF by activity or sub-activity type;
- 20           - vendor response time by location;
- 21           - vendor response time by time of day;
- 22           - vendor mean time to repair;

- 1           -     **asset control and location reports;**
- 2           -     **comparisons for the same operational hour by hardware type;**
- 3           -     **comparisons for the same operational hour by transaction type;**
- 4           -     **equipment reports.**

5     These reports show the orientation of the information with respect to network  
6     availability, relative cost factors, and network performance versus fault diagnosis. Many  
7     other types of reporting can be selected by using the data that has been collected in  
8     creative user selectable ways.

9           Preferred and alternate embodiments of the present invention have now been  
10    described in detail. It is to be noted, however, that this description of these specific  
11    embodiments is merely illustrative of the principles underlying the inventive concept. It  
12    is therefore contemplated that various modifications of the disclosed embodiments will,  
13    without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, be apparent to persons of  
14    ordinary skill in the art.



**CLAIMS:**

1. A method for providing reports on characteristics of a computer network comprising:
  - a) monitoring all network transactions;
  - b) collecting data for the network transactions;
  - c) providing the data to a centralized database;
  - d) manipulating the data to produce a standard report describing management and financial characteristics of the network;
  - e) receiving a user request for a standard report;
  - f) transmitting the standard report to an end-user location; and
  - g) presenting the standard report to the user.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - a) receiving user inputs defining particular network transaction data of interest;
  - b) receiving user data defining particular report format parameters;
  - c) receiving user data defining a network topology of interest;
  - d) manipulating the data defining particular report format data, the data defining particular report format parameters, and the data defining a network topology of interest to produce a custom report describing the network management and financial characteristics of the network of interest to the user;
  - e) receiving a user request for a custom report;
  - f) transmitting the custom report to an end-user location; and

1 g) presenting the custom report to the user.

2 3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:

3 a) storing the user inputs defining particular network transaction data of  
4 interest of a first user, the user data defining particular report format  
5 parameters of the first user, and the user data defining a network topology of  
6 interest of the first user; and

7 b) automatically applying the user inputs defining particular network  
8 transaction data of interest of the first user, the user data defining particular  
9 report format parameters of the first user, and the user data defining a  
10 network topology of interest of the first user to the network data in response  
11 to a request for a network report by the first user.

12 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising summarizing the data for the  
13 network transactions prior to transmitting the data to the centralized database.

14 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the standard report further describes  
15 operational characteristics of the network.

16 6. The method of claim 1, wherein providing the data to a centralized database  
17 includes sending the data via a dedicated communications facility to the centralized  
18 database.

19 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the dedicated communications facility is a  
20 virtual network.

21 8. The method of claim 6, wherein the dedicated communications facility is a  
22 physical communications network.

1           9.     The method of claim 1, wherein the monitoring of network transactions and  
2     the collection of data takes place continuously.

3           10.    The method of claim 1, wherein monitoring all network transactions  
4     comprises capturing and measuring user local area network activity, and wher in  
5     collecting data for the network transactions comprises classifying the local area  
6     network activity according to defined categories.

7           11.    The method of claim 6, wherein monitoring all network transactions  
8     comprises capturing and measuring user local area network activity, and wher in  
9     collecting data for the network transactions comprises classifying the local area  
10    network activity according to defined categories.

11          12.    The method of claim 10, wherein the defined catgories are user-defined.

12          13.    The method of claim 10, wherein the defined catgories are defined by at  
13    least one directory, said at least one directory being selected from the group of  
14    directories consisting of equipment directories, transaction directories, and  
15    communications directories.

16          14.    The method of claim 1, further comprising manipulating the data to produce  
17    a custom report describing management and financial characteristics of the network  
18    according to any format defined by a user.

19          15.    The method of claim 1, further comprising storing the report for futur  
20    presentation to a user.

21          16.    The method of claim 15, further comprising presenting a plurality of stored  
22    reports to the user in a comparison format.

- 1           17. A system for providing reports on the characteristics of a computer network,  
2 comprising:
- 3           a) a monitor disposed to monitor all network transactions;
  - 4           b) a network manager disposed to collect data for the network transactions;
  - 5           c) a central resource center;
  - 6           d) a network facility disposed to provide the data to a centralized database and  
7           to provide a standard report to an end-user location, the standard report  
8           describing the network management and financial characteristics of the  
9           network;
  - 10          e) a processor disposed to manipulate the data to produce the standard report  
11          and to receive a user request for a standard report; and
  - 12          f) a presentation device disposed to present the standard report to the user.
- 13          18. The system of claim 17, wherein:
- 14          a) the processor is further disposed to receive user inputs defining particular  
15          network transaction data of interest;
  - 16          b) the processor is further disposed to receive user data defining particular  
17          report format parameters;
  - 18          c) the processor is further disposed to receive user data defining a network  
19          topology of interest;
  - 20          d) the processor is further disposed to manipulate the data defining particular  
21          report format data, the data defining particular report format parameters, and  
22          the data defining a network topology of interest to produce a custom report

- 1 describing the network management and financial characteristics of the  
2 network of interest to the user;
- 3 e) the processor is further disposed to receive a user request for a custom  
4 report;
- 5 f) the network is further disposed to transmit the custom report to an end-user  
6 location; and
- 7 g) the presentation device is further disposed to present the custom report to  
8 the user.
- 9 19. The system of claim 18, further comprising:
- 10 a) memory in the centralized database adapted to store the user inputs  
11 defining particular network transaction data of interest of a first user, the  
12 user data defining particular report format parameters of the first user, and  
13 the user data defining a network topology of interest of the first user; and
- 14 b) wherein the processor is adapted to automatically apply the user inputs  
15 defining particular network transaction data of interest of the first user, the  
16 user data defining particular report format parameters of the first user, and  
17 the user data defining a network topology of interest of the first user to the  
18 network data in response to a request for a network report by the first user.
- 19 20. The system of claim 17, wherein the central resource center is further  
20 adapted to summarize the data for the network transactions prior to transmitting the  
21 data to the centralized database.
- 22 21. The system of claim 17, wherein the standard report further describes

1 operational characteristics of the network.

2 22. The system of claim 17, wherein the network facility comprises a dedicated  
3 communications facility.

4 23. The system of claim 22, wherein the dedicated communications facility is  
5 further connected to the processor.

6 24. The system of claim 17, wherein the dedicated communications facility  
7 comprises a virtual network.

8 25. The system of claim 17, wherein the dedicated communications facility  
9 comprises a physical communications network.

10 26. The system of claim 17, wherein the monitors are further disposed to  
11 continuously monitor all network transactions and the network manager is further  
12 disposed to continuously collect data for the network transactions.

13 27. The system of claim 17, wherein all network transactions comprise user  
14 local area network activity and wherein the network manager is further disposed to  
15 classify the local area network activity according to defined categories.

16 28. The system of claim 22, wherein all network transactions comprise user  
17 local area network activity and wherein the network manager is further disposed to  
18 classify the local area network activity according to defined categories.

19 29. The system of claim 27, further comprising a directory input device disposed  
20 to accept an equipment directory, a communication directory, and a transaction  
21 directory and further to define the network in terms of the equipment directory, the  
22 communication directory, and the transaction directory.

1           30. The system of claim 17, wherein the processor is further disposed to  
2       manipulate the data to produce a custom report according to any format defined by a  
3       user and to receive a user request for the standard report.

4           31. The system of claim 19, wherein the memory is further adapted to store the  
5       standard report.

6           32. The system of claim 30, wherein the memory is further adapted to store the  
7       custom report.

8           33. The system of claim 31, wherein the processor is further disposed to  
9       manipulate a plurality of stored reports to produce a comparison report in a format  
10      comparing data presented in the plurality of stored reports and to receive a user  
11      request for a comparison report.

12          34. The system of claim 32, wherein the processor is further disposed to  
13      manipulate a plurality of stored reports to produce a comparison report in a format  
14      comparing data presented in the plurality of stored reports and to receive a user request  
15      for a comparison report.

          35. A method for providing reports on characteristics of  
a computer network, the method being substantially as herein-  
before described with reference to the accompanying drawing.

          36. A system for providing reports on characteristics of  
a computer network, the system being substantially as herein-  
before described with reference to the accompanying drawing.



Application No: GB 9501980.8  
Claims searched: 1-36

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**Patents Act 1977  
Search Report under Section 17**

**Databases searched:**

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK CI (Ed.N): H4P(PEUX); G4A(AFMG,AUXF)

Int CI (Ed.6): G06F 11/30, 11/32, 11/34

Other:

**Documents considered to be relevant:**

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage		Relevant to claims
X	GB2271250A	Digital Equipment - see page 3, line 1	1,17
X	GB2261801A	Australian & Overseas Telecoms. - see page 2, lines 17-31	1,17
X	EP0494335A2	Hewlett-Packard - see claim 3	all
X	WO92/21089A1	Anstey - see whole spec.	all
X	WO92/05485A3	Cabletron Systems - see abstract	1,17
X	US4823290	Honeywell Bull - see abstract	1,17
X	US4774664	Chrysler First - see column 15, lines 11-66	all
X	US4334270	Towers - see abstract	all

X Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step  
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